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Jan Mayen Island has always been a place that earned my attention because of its remoteness, interesting history, and heritage. It seems like a place that would be a great setting for a good movie or a good book. Back in 2009, when I started DXpeditioning, I was thinking of visiting the island for a couple of reasons, not only from a DXer's perspective, but also to make my dreams and my friends' dreams come true. The JX-land is not an easy place to go to. Though it is not far from the European continent, there are

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The Midnight Sun DXpedition to Jan Mayen Island—JX5O

By Stan Strzyżewski, SQ8X



A fine summer day on Jan Mayen greets the INDEXA flag. Getting there and keeping warm is the REAL story.

very few available means of transportation to reach the island. We had to exclude any flights from Norway (all flights are restricted for military purposes only) and to charter a sailboat to get there.

The first plan assumed we would activate the island in 2010, but all cruises had been fully booked well ahead and we had to postpone the DXpedition until 2011. Although all team members were quite disappointed with that situation, we gained a big advantage in that decision—more time for planning!

Meanwhile there was sufficient time to identify the team to activate the island. Although my plan assumed to have at least 3-4 very experienced operators, I always wanted to undertake projects open to newcomers or operators who never had a chance to participate in DXpeditions before. The reason is simple. If DXpeditions are always focused to use only operators who have been on a number of expeditions, and closed for newcomers—how can we attract new DXpeditioners in the future to ensure the hobby, tradition and adventures develop and live on?

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Since there was a long gap between the selection of the first team and our eventual departure date, a couple of team members had to resign due to personal problems or their work duties. The final JX5O team consisted of following members (in random order):

- o SV2KBS/LA7VPA – Vicky (ex ZL8X, VP8YLG, VK9LA, XRØY)
- o HB9ASZ - Bernhard (ex FT5XO, VP8THU, VP8GEO, ZL8R)
- o NI1L – Leszek (ex XRØY)
- o SM0MDG – Björn (ex JW, OY, OJØ, OHØ, 5X, CU2, CT9, OY, DU IOTA trip, MSØINT)
- o SQ9C – Tom (experienced contester)
- o SQ9DIE – Pete (ex VK9LA)
- o TF3ZA – Jón (experienced contester)
- o Ania – Chilid.pl/RTTY operator
- o and myself: SQ8X – Stan (team leader, ex XRØY, VK9LA, K5D Off-Island Team member)

The licensing process resulted in a series of progressive changes to our prospective ticket. At first we intended to activate the island under Vicky's Norwegian callsign, transformed according to regulations to LX7VPA. Then Ringsjoen Contest Club (LA5O) offered the use of their club callsign transformed to JX5O, which made running pileups much easier and comfortable, of course! The licensing process at the Norwegian Post and Telecommunication Office itself was a real pleasure. Short and fast replies, quick decisions and simple rules—that's the way it was with the NPT.

I had been searching for a proper boat charter company to negotiate our plans and needs. My final choice was the Borea Adventures company based in Ísafjörður, Northwest Iceland. The company, run by two very experienced tour operators and expeditioners (Sigurður "Siggi" Jónsson and Rúnar Óli Karlsson), offers a number of off-beaten-trail trips including Greenland, Iceland, and Jan Mayen Island. They are also one of two companies in the world licensed to land at the island.

Since we chartered the sailboat as a group, we had a chance to change the regular itinerary to better suit our needs. A few extra days at the island were negotiated and also some special arrangements regarding provisions and our campsite location became possible. And that wasn't an easy part of the plan at all. Jan Mayen Island is a strict nature reserve since November 2010 when the King of Nor-

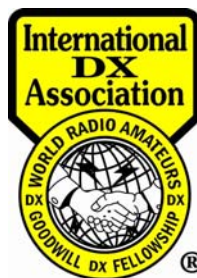
way—His Majesty Harald V—announced a special protection program concerning nature conservation at a number of Norwegian territories, including the JX-land. No wonder—the island is really unique in every respect: the nature, its location, climate, natural and historical heritage and so on. The island is also an important location for a NATO radio-controlled navigation system called Loran and a crucial place for a new satellite positioning system in Europe called Galileo. In addition, Jan Mayen Island has been the very first place in the world where the first automatic meteo (meteorological) station has been installed which was capable of transmitting data on airwaves.

While planning the DXpedition I had to take into consideration three important factors that would affect our DXpedition. The first and the most important one: weather conditions and security procedures. The island lies north of the Arctic circle and is surrounded by the Gulf Stream. That means that local weather conditions are usually very unstable and may change dramatically within a few hours. And, we experienced a glimpse of some of those changes. The 2nd factor was also a very important one: cost of transportation and cost of additional items/equipment to be purchased. We had about 700kg of equipment to transport to Jan Mayen. Sending that to Iceland via sea cargo appeared to be more expensive than taking a loaded 4x4 car from Poland and to go to Iceland via ferry! So, we did just that! Our 2 team members – Pete SQ9DIE and his YL Ania decided to

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take their Land Rover and take the ferry from Denmark. They said after that—what an adventure! Last, but not least – the 3rd factor was the propagation forecast versus our landing and operating site. The only place that the island commissioner allowed us to land is situated at Gammelmetten, an abandoned former meteo station settlement located at Northwestern side at the island. The location underneath the world famous stratovolcano Beerenberg (2277m above sea level) appeared to be a challenge both for our landing procedure as well as a place from which to operate.

The team gathered in the capital city of Iceland—Reykjavík on July 2, 2011. We stayed in a place away from the city's centre that had enough backyard space to test our equipment before departing for Jan Mayen. We had sufficient time to erect our Hex-beams and a few verticals and to make a number of test QSOs from Iceland. We also purchased two big camping tents which would be used for our operating shelters at the island. Two days later we left for the North of Iceland—a little fishermen's village called Dalvík, where our sailboat would await the team to depart for Jan Mayen.



The 60 foot sloop, Aurora, that was to be our home during passage to Jan Mayen lies dwarfed by other boats in Dalvík.

We found our sailboat “Aurora” moored in Dalvík harbor. It's a 60 foot sloop sailboat built by Colvic Craft in the UK in 1996. She was designed by David Pedrick for the Clipper Round the World Race and has been raced around the world four times.

Even though she's not small and has enough cargo space for oceanic passages, the crew of the boat looked at the amount of our gear with a mix of apprehension and amusement. Loading all the equipment took approximately four hours and we were ready to depart. Calm waters in Dalvík's fjord looked inviting. The boat was moving easily in the light breeze in the fjord towards the open sea in the



All's well in the early going, above, but a few hours later, stomachs began to churn from heavy seas, below.



north. However, the sea was much less inviting outside of the fjord with gale force winds and high waves. The heavy weather lasted for almost 16 hours and was a real challenge for everybody. Two of our team members suffered extreme sea-sickness. They spent more than 12 hours on their berths and their symptoms disappeared only after the sea calmed down. The rest of the team was quite resistant to 5m tall waves crashing against “Aurora”. And some team

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members were even enjoying their time feeling like being inside a space capsule thrown with enormous gravity loads and swells. Once the storm disappeared, there was a total calm with no wind and no waves. The rest of the passage had to be done on engine power. In the middle of our way to Jan Mayen we experienced a phenomenon called “oily glows”. It’s a beautiful state of sea when there is totally no wind and water’s movements are so little that the water surface floats almost still. Then sunlight reflections and sky glitters form amazing, colorful patters around you as far as you can see. Experiencing the phenomenon at midnight sun was really something. In addition, we saw dolphins and humpbacks playing around, too. What a sight! Another surprising thing we experienced was something that I could describe as a false horizon. The calm sea was “merging” and mixing with clouds and the line of horizons so confusingly that it was almost impossible to figure out where the sky or the sea ends and it felt like the sky touched the sea only about 300m (0,1 miles) from us. It was quite claustrophobic and strange sight indeed.



At times we couldn't tell where the horizon ended and the sky began. We called this the "false horizon".

On late July 5, 2011, after almost 3 days of sailing, we started to see the South westernmost tip of Jan Mayen. It appeared partially covered by foggy patches in total silence, very high humidity and mild light lit through a flat layer of clouds by a mild midnight sun. We reached our landing site—a black, sandy beach next to Gammelmetten right after midnight July 6, and we decided to land right away as weather con-

ditions were in favor of our plans. I think the landing (and then leaving the island) was the hardest part of the DXpedition. We were really tired with 3-days long sailing and sea-sickness, and it was clear to everybody that nobody would sleep for the next 24 hours at all. The boat's crew used a zodiac to transport us to the island first. Each trip took approximately 15 minutes and each would transport 2 people and some amount of luggage. After getting all



The beginning of the arduous process of getting all of our gear ashore, one boatload at a time.

the operators to the shore several additional trips were required to get the rest of our equipment to the shore. I must to mention all the equipment was sealed with plastic in case of sea swells. Then we had to face another hard part of the plan: transportation of the equipment to the camping site located approx. 2km (1,3 miles) from the landing site. Since

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Then, all the gear up the hill—on our backs!

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we were not allowed to use any vehicles at the island, we were forced to carry all items up very steep slopes leading to the site putting steps in a very unstable, slippery lava gravel. I cannot remember how many walks I did that night. But I remember so well those five, darn 30L canisters full of fuel I took up there on my back! While we were transporting our radio gear, our superb crew started to assemble our “bedroom” camp consisting of 5 expedition tents and one bigger tent used as a kitchen. Nobody wanted to go to sleep until we put at least 1 or 2 stations up to let the world know we landed safely and had our transmissions on the air at last. It felt strange and at the same time incredibly wonderful to see things happening after almost 2 years of planning.



Despite our exhaustion, we felt we had to get on the air. The Hexbeams came together quickly while our boat crew raised the sleeping and kitchen tents.



As mentioned before, Gammelmetten is situated by volcano's slopes blocking the short path towards Europe. This was something that caused us concern before we began our operation, but once we launched our stations we noticed that signals coming from EU were quite decent and we had no problems working all countries across that continent. There were wonderful openings towards North America, even through that more difficult path affected by aurora's zone to the West Coast. Also Japan was coming through very smoothly. It was really interesting to see those openings lasting as long as they did. But then, we also had a chance to experience the most frustrating and disturbing thing so well known to all operators living at higher latitudes—aurora activity. It is able to “turn off” conditions within 30-60 seconds causing all bands being flat dead. We were conscious of frustration at the other end while our responders were thinking we probably pulled the plug and went for coffee or something. But we soon learned we were unable to do anything about bringing back the propagation until Mother Nature allowed it to happen. In addition to aurora's blackouts there was very annoying QRN on lower bands. The lower the frequency, the stronger the QRN. For instance operating 40m CW at those times was nearly impossible as all signals were merging together into a noisy, fluttering “pulp”. The most surprising QSOs were made into French Polynesia and St. Helena island where bands seemed to be dead but single, totally selective and unexpected openings occurred. In general the propagation pattern was following the sun. First days of the DXpedition provided definitely better scores as conditions were much better. There were at least three days affected by aurora very much. Unfortunately being at Jan Mayen during Arctic summer with 24/7 broad sunlight confirmed our predictions: 160 and 80m were flat dead.

We were quite fortunate that our first two days, when we were busy setting up all stations, were very calm and warm. Then weather conditions started to play tricks with us. There were snow falls followed by rain showers and wind exceeding 80km/h (50mph). Once the wind started to blow, we were attacked by very powerful wind gusts reaching 100km/h (63mph) that caused volcanic pumice ash to permeate the inside our tents, mouth, ears, eyes.

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The Midnight Sun DXpedition to Jan Mayen Island—JX5O (Con'd)



Shown here are our joyous days with bright skies before the “summer” weather turned bad.

And inside our equipment, too. Surprisingly, the ash was very resistant to humidity and was still very invasive even after rain falls.

The biggest problem occurred when the wind started to tear our tents. Fortunately we were prepared for such cases and we secured the tents from further damages. Believe me—operating from inside a tent that was close to collapse was not easy because of loud winds roaring for long hours. Additionally, under such humid conditions with fog and rain showers the wind chill was well below freezing making our hands and faces stiff and uncomfortable.



Keeping one's fingers from becoming stiff while holding the tent together and giving QSOs to “the deserving” is what amateur radio is all about. We call this fun! HI HI



In the midst of what may seem like desolation, there is an unusual beauty to be found in the land of the midnight sun.



Our flexible shifts were a natural way to allow those operators who were less resistant to such harsh conditions to have some more rest while those more hardy ones operated longer. The kitchen tent was a wonderful place for gathering for those operators heading to sleeping tents or going back to the radios. A mug of warm tea or a bowl of hot soup was a real treat then.

Observing all regulations—especially the local nature conservation guidelines—was really critical for making the expedition a success and keeping the possibility for future amateur radio operations to the island open. The strict regulations are there for a reason. For example: we found snowmobile trails left in moss—made 60 years ago! They still remain there today because vegetation at the island is so slow to recover due to harsh climate and location. We kept our camp site clean, removed all litter on

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our departure, and did not disturb any birds living at the island. Maybe our awareness and good behavior paid off as we were invited by the island Commissioner to visit the Olonkin base located at the South-westernmost tip of the island. It was a big privilege for us as not too many visitors to Jan Mayen are offered that chance. Two days before our departure, staff members came to take us to the base to visit it and to have our first hot shower in almost 2 weeks. We were surprised with the base officer's hospitality and stories he told us about the base. No wonder we enjoyed cozy rooms of the



The cozy warmth of the quarters of the island Commissioner was a welcome change from the austere accommodations of a tent north of the Arctic Circle.



The warm showers we enjoyed at the Island Commission contrasted to the fresh water "baths" we'd taken in the "lake" at Gammelmetten. Brrrrrr!!

building—it was warm there. And even a bit too warm, I'd say, since the human body starts to adapt to external weather conditions in such places very quickly. We enjoyed a very fine, sunny and warm day, the last calm day at the island. The weather forecast was not promising at all. Our Aurora crew decided to depart back for Iceland a day earlier than scheduled. Although we totally understood such circumstances, we wished we could stay on the island much longer. Our trip back to Iceland was much more peaceful and there was no storm this time. Since we were very exhausted, most of the team members spent the time below deck sleeping



Sleep came easily in a warm bunk on the return voyage after spending long hours working the amateur radio bands.

and making short breaks for delicious meals served by our crew. We were also very lucky to see whales one more time. One of bigger humpbacks was following Aurora for a few minutes right UNDER the boat. That was a jaw-dropping experience indeed!

As a gesture of thankfulness, the team donated a 6m beacon antenna to the Jan Mayen Island Commissioner to re-activate the 6m beacon that died a few years ago. The antenna is now installed a few kilometers SW from Gammelmetten and has been operational since October 18, 2011 with a callsign of JX7SIX and is being heard across the world. (See photo on the next page.)

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A new six meter beacon antenna donated to the Island Commissioner now has JX7SIX back on the air.



These two youthful veteran DXpeditioners are already asking, "Where next?"

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We would like to thank INDEXA for supporting our project and for the generous donation without which it would definitely have been hard to undertake the JX50 DXpedition. I also wish to thank Per-Einar LA7DFA, Rag LA6FJA, LA5O Ringsjoen Contest Club, Borea Adventures, the Club Log and the Jan Mayen Island Commissioner for their great input and help to make JX50 possible. I can't also omit fantastic help provided by our Icelandic team member—Jón (TF3ZA), and his father—Erling (TF3EE). Without their logistical support and Icelandic know-how we would probably not have been able to undertake the project as smoothly as we all did. Thank you!

The JX50 Team & project leader

Stan

Stan Strzyżewski, SQ8X

More information and news archive of JX50:

<http://janmayen2011.org/>

Full JX50 stats are available at:

<http://www.clublog.org/charts/?c=JX50#r>

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